

CREATING CHARACTERS

"It's incumbent upon me to create a human being that's inside that story that has a full life."

—Samuel L. Jackson

SUBCHAPTERS

- Create a Whole Person
- Start With Your Character's Goal
- Analyze Your Character's Relationships
- Make Thoughtful Choices
- Give the Audience Something to Latch Onto
- Creating a Relatable Character in *Die Hard*
- Don't Judge Your Characters

CHAPTER REVIEW

Acting is about having a series of goals. It's about getting from point A to point C with no anticipation of what the outcome will be. Whenever Sam is on stage or on camera—even if it's only for a few minutes—he makes sure his character's goal is completely embodied.

Source material is a great place to start when working on a new script or character, if it's available. If there's no source material to draw from, it's your job to create a full backstory for your character. A thorough biography must include life experiences and personality traits that will inform the way your character thinks, speaks, and behaves on stage or on screen. Begin deducing these biographical details by examining your character's relationships with other characters in the script. Be sure not to discount any clues given to you in the actual text.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Sam believes you should never approach your characters with moral judgment. Who is the most detestable character you've ever seen in a film? Study that script as if you were preparing to play the role, asking yourself, "Why does this character do what they do? What elements of their past or personality have brought them to their present actions?" Challenge yourself to create a rich backstory for the character using clues in the script, such as their relationships and actions. This will ultimately give you empathy for the character and will allow you to view the world through their lens.

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ASSIGNMENTS

- It's time for you to select a new audition piece. But before you pick a specific monologue, just choose a script you want to work with. Don't pick your favorite movie or play — select a story unfamiliar to you. You'll stretch your imagination and you won't be influenced by the choices other actors have already made. You'll work on breaking down this script and its characters throughout this class. Read the script several times over. Which character captures your attention? Zero in on them. Map out their goals, learn their relationships, and start thinking about a biography that could explain their present and future actions. Write down your discoveries.
- Sam finds creating biographies incredibly important when crafting a character. Try this method out by creating a biography of the character you know best: yourself. What life-events informed your morals and influenced your goals? What do you want, and how do you go about getting it? As you ruminate, do you find that you're judging yourself? Write the first page of your own character biography.

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NOTES

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